

## Memories and Songs of the Bard of Thomondgate

# THE BALLADS OF TOM GLYNN

(With Notes by John Quinn and Mahon Hamilton)

Michael Hogan, the Bard of Thomond, died in 1899. In December of the same year, Tom Glynn was born. Thus we can see the continuation of a tradition. Michael Hogan, with the legendary "Drunken Thady", has recorded the earlier Limerick. We can appreciate how the people lived then, "with the bells of St. Mary's tower ringing and candlelight in every window glist'ning." An interesting reference in "Drunken Thady" is that on "Stein's Distillery". Later on, this firm was taken over by Archibald Walker, and was named the Thomondgate Distillery. This item appeared in the Limerick Chronicle on June 16th, 1877:

"We learn that two grinding wheels of Thomondgate Distillery which were destroyed by firesome time ago, are now being reconstructed and that the proprietor, Mr. Archibald Walker, hopes to resume 'making' in a few months".

The young Tom Glynn, formerly of 58 New Road and 11 Creagh Avenue, grew up in Thomondgate, and was like Michael Hogan proud to be called a "Soda Cake".

Inspired by the generosity and true Christianity of the people, Tom started to write about his "Native place". He wrote of the New Road and the sparkling Shannon, and of course, the Distillery, the same Distillery referred to in "Drunken Thady". So many years had passed since then, and time extracts its toll. The Distillery had closed, the wheels had stopped grinding, and the chains began to rust on the wooden doors. This was the Distillery Tom Glynn saw. And he wrote about it in his most famous ballad, the St. Munchins' Parish Anthem, "Dear Old Thomondgate".

### "Dear Old Thomondgate"

"There's no Parish in this State can compete with this noble spot called Dear Old Thomondgate."

These lines from the Parish Anthem, truly echo Tom Glynn's deep love of his native parish. He spoke of the hard times which the older generation lived in. He regretted to see the youth of to-day spending money, which in his time would take a man a month to earn. He longed to see the day when Thomondgate would be rebuilt and when sanitary conditions in many of the old houses would be improved.

He was proud of the new houses at O'Dwyer Villas, Kileely and Ballynatty.

These houses gave a new lease of life to the parish, which had been slowly crumbling away. And Tom would say: "in time these people will become more Soda Cake than the Soda Cakes themselves."

Thus we hear Tom's "Dear Old Thomondgate"—St. Munchin's Parish Anthem sung and revered by all the people of the Parish:

Air—I sit beside the Anner

Oh! Thomondgate my native place, so beautiful and grand!

We see the Shannon's purple

tide there rolling down the Strand.  
When you walk out the New Road, you can view the hills of Clare,  
They are nicer than Killarney or the plains of old Kildare.

Oh! the merry boys and girls here wherever they may roam,  
You will always find that they have come from where the River Shannon flows.  
In dancing they are famous and great songs they can relate,  
Oh! 'tis little wonder we are proud of dear old Thomondgate!

You hear them speak of foreign lands their landscapes and their pride,  
Their castles and their mansions far reaching to the sky;  
We hear of the great Niagara Falls in the great United States,  
But what is that to the Curraghould that sweeps through Thomondgate?

Oh! there lived a man named Billy Lee he came from Limerick Town,  
He used to come out there every night and knock the Peelers down.  
The Peelers could not take him, sure his strength it was so great.  
One night he came and met his match in Dear Old Thomondgate.

Oh! Thomondgate is nigh well gone from what it used to be,  
Long ago they made fine whiskey in the old Distillery.  
Its rambling walls are standing yet, the shaft stands tall and straight,  
It commemorates the good old days in Dear Old Thomondgate.

We are noted here in this old place for large funerals and great wakes.  
Some people call us Munchins while more call us Soda Cakes;  
But let them call us what they like, there is no Parish in this State  
Can compete with this noble spot called Dear Old Thomondgate.

The Distillery is almost gone now. All that stands is the end wall with the huge bay window. This is the last link with old Thomondgate.

Today houses stand where once the Bard of Thomond walked. If you wish to see how the Distillery looked to the Bard, visit Martin O'Halloran's bar in the New Road. There you will see an advertisement for and a photograph of the old Distillery. This Distillery for long formed an integral part of life in old Thomondgate. Now it is gone. An era has come to an end. The grass grows wild around its remaining wall. The Shannon still rushes over the Curraghould. And we have the writings and ballads of Michael Hogan and Tom Glynn.

### "The Streams of Meelick"

Out the old Ennis Road (past the rugby ground) turn right for Meelick Church, and on to Knockalisheen, or for the sturdy walker, down the Sweeps road. For the people of Thomondgate this was yet another lovely walk for the family to take on a Sunday afternoon. You met the neighbours and had a chat. In the old days the musician and the folks from far and near assembled at Meelick Cross roads, where they danced their sets and half sets. Here too many a romance was kindled. Tom Glynn spent many happy hours roaming around this part of County Clare. He spoke of the great evenings had by one and all at these sessions, and was inspired to write yet another ballad which is dearly cherished by the people of that locality, namely, "The Streams of Meelick":

#### "THE STREAMS OF MEELICK"

Oh I'll write this song in memory of those happy days gone by.  
When often we sat on the grass beneath the summer sky;  
The summer sun was rolling by at the evening's gentle close,  
You could see the silver trout swim down  
Where the streams of Meelick flow.

Now Meelick is a lovely spot, the birthplace of good men.  
It was often there they drilled and marched through mountains and through glens;  
They roamed the hills there late at night and ne'er feared any foes.  
But who would dare to challenge them?  
Where the streams of Meelick flow.

An old iron bridge is standing yet, the scenes of great romance.  
Each Sunday night the boys and girls assembled there to dance.  
The sun was setting in the sky and the dew descended low.  
And underneath that rustic bridge the streams of Meelick flow.

Now the birds are singing on the trees to welcome God's clear air.  
The old church bell is ringing out calling you to prayer.  
The blessed sun is shining down on the meadows where they mow.  
You can see the men and women laid where the streams of Meelick flow.

### "The Maid of Sweet Parteen"

Sunday afternoon from May until September usually saw the people from Thomondgate strolling out in the direction of Parteen village.

At that time the family man would make a first stop at Davidson's pub. Light refreshments for the wife and children. And for the men, pints of creamy Guinness to wash down the bacon and cabbage. Then they would leave and slowly walk over the Tailrace Bridge and up the hill to Parteen.

As one walked up to the church, the words of Tom's ballad were brought very much to mind: "Oh the Little Church from the Hill is shining and the golden sun on its windows gaze."

In the church the children would light a penny candle and the few prayers were said. No visit to Parteen would be complete without a call to Browns. Here the sing-song was usually in full swing and this often proved to be the start of the evening's entertainment. Remember in those days cinemas were closed on Sundays, and television was unknown.

When the church bell tolled out the Angelus, it was time to return home. Another stop at Davidson's, and here arrangements were made for the entertainment to continue in some neighbour's house. It was on his innumerable visits to Parteen that Tom Glynn wrote this beautiful ballad, "The Maid of Sweet Parteen".

Air—The Bells Of Shandon.

It was in November do I well remember  
The stars of Heaven shone through the blue sky,  
As the moon was veiling the clouds were reeling,  
And covered mountains and valleys high.  
As I was roving down through the meadows,  
I spied a colleen all dressed in green;  
Her hair was golden, her eyes had told me,  
She was the maiden of sweet Parteen.

Oh the little church from the hill is shining,  
And the golden sun on its windows gaze,  
And the chiming bell with its soft sweet music,  
Rings out its notes on the banks and braes.  
The singing river with all its beauty,  
Sweeping the banks so fair and green;  
It was often swam in rival faction,  
To win the maiden of sweet Parteen.

It was through that village I did ramble,  
The night was dark and my spirit low,  
And for your dear sake, I would cross the ocean,  
Or to the scaffold I would go,  
Or through this world I would wonder,  
If I were a King, I'd make you my Queen;  
I would bring my soldiers across the mountains,  
And take you away from sweet Parteen.

—(Composed in the year 1924)

These are only some of the ballads of Tom Glynn. They will bring back nostalgic memories for readers who remember those pleasant days.